





[With the Author's Compliments,

*A Kind regards*

DR JOHN BROWN :

HIS LIFE AND WORK; WITH NARRATIVE SKETCHES OF

SYME

IN THE OLD MINTO HOUSE HOSPITAL AND DISPENSARY DAYS.

BEING THE

HARVEIAN SOCIETY FESTIVAL ORATION,

DELIVERED 11th APRIL 1890,

BY ALEXANDER PEDDIE, M.D., F.R.C.P. ED.



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IN compliance with the request of a number of professional and other friends, the following Address has been reprinted for private circulation from the May and June numbers of the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*. This I feel especially due to those Fellows of the Harveian Society who honoured me by their presence at the recent Festival, and their kindly reception of the address—of which only about one-half could be read within the time at my disposal.

As it was written for a gathering of medical men, I expect non-professional readers will pass over those pages which are strictly of a medical nature ; and on the other hand, for the information of such as have no clear idea of the objects of our Harveian Festivals, I have ventured to place as an Appendix what I said in proposing the toast of the evening,—“The Immortal Memory of Harvey.”

A. PEDDIE.

15 RUTLAND STREET,  
3rd June 1890.

DR JOHN BROWN: HIS LIFE AND WORK; WITH NARRATIVE  
SKETCHES OF JAMES SYME IN THE OLD MINTO HOUSE  
HOSPITAL AND DISPENSARY DAYS.

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GENTLEMEN,—In occupying the honoured position of President on this the 108th Anniversary of your Society, I have felt considerable difficulty in the choice of a subject for the customary address; for it has seemed to me scarcely possible to dress up in a new garb the well-chronicled facts connected with the life of the immortal HARVEY, his great discovery of the circulation of the blood, or the times in which he lived. Besides, in casting my thoughts over the wide fields of medical science and art, I have felt incapable—and I think at my time of life you could scarcely expect me—to contribute anything new in the way of scientific research. I have therefore chosen to address you on the lines of professional reminiscence and biography, which I know have on several former festive occasions been most acceptable; and I now propose to do so under the above title.

The following narrative sketches will of course be chiefly confined to the 23 years—from 1829 to 1852—during which Minto House existed, first as a public Surgical Hospital and Dispensary, and afterwards as a private *Maison de Santé* and a public Dispensary. But in order to delineate the more striking characteristics of the popular writer and “beloved Physician,” and of the distinguished Surgeon and Teacher, I cannot altogether avoid throwing a little of the light of earlier and later days—especially those of Dr Brown—on the page of narrative and descriptive biography. I trust, however, in doing this I may not be considered too much of a hero-worshipper, or the

time at my disposal to-night unprofitably spent in bringing back from the past fragmentary notices of the life and work of these two uniquely distinguished men, whose personalities are worthy to be preserved from the modifying course of time. Besides, many Harveians now present were only boys at school when Syme died in 1870; a larger number were unborn at the end of his first decade as Professor of Clinical Surgery in our University in 1843; and only one, Sir Douglas Maclagan, besides myself, is here who knew him, or John Brown, or anything of Minto House Surgical Hospital in its early days. I trust, therefore, that what I say on this occasion may not be without interest; and that although my own life and work was so much interwoven with that of my revered master, and my nearly entire life-long friend, and the Institution which kept us so many years in close connexion, I shall strictly exclude, as far as possible, that which is personal to myself, while I endeavour to avoid the garrulousness so often the failing, but which has also been said to be "the privilege of seniority."

For fuller information regarding Mr Syme than I can give within the compass of this address, I must refer you to the memoir<sup>1</sup> by the late Dr Robert Paterson of Leith, to whom I communicated all the particulars regarding Minto House Hospital; and I may also refer you to an excellent obituary notice in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* of August 1870, by our esteemed Harveian Dr Joseph Bell.

John Brown was born on the 22nd September 1810, of highly distinguished intellectual and spiritual lineage. His father, the Rev. John Brown, was then minister of the Secession Church in Biggar, afterwards of the church in Rose Street, Edinburgh, and latterly of Broughton Place. He received the title of D.D. in 1830 from Jefferson College, Pennsylvania; was the Professor of Practical and Exegetical Theology in the United Presbyterian Church; the author of various works of high repute for biblical learning, critical acumen, and evangelical teaching; and was a preacher of great power and popularity. John's grandfather, again, was the Rev. John Brown of Whitburn, a devout and popular minister and author in the same denomination—in which also were his three grand-uncles, the Rev. Ebenezer Brown

<sup>1</sup> Edmonstone & Douglas, Edin. 1874.



of Inverkeithing, the Rev. Dr Thomas Brown of Dalkeith, and the Rev. Dr William Brown, long secretary of the Scottish Missionary Society, all men of piety, mental capacity, and diversified distinctiveness. John's great-grandfather, again, was the celebrated Rev. John Brown of Haddington, the author of *The Self-interpreting Bible*, of whom the story is told of his having—while a herd laddie—taught himself Greek, and walked over-night 24 miles to a bookseller's shop in St Andrews in order to buy a Greek Testament to enable him to read the sacred volume in the original tongue. The master of the shop, surprised at the request from such a youth, informed some Professors who came into the shop shortly afterwards of these remarkable circumstances. One of the party got the sacred volume from a shelf, and looking out a passage, said, "Boy read this, and you shall have it for nothing." It was accordingly won, to the astonishment and admiration of those present; and our Dr John has told us,<sup>1</sup> that "that Testament has come into my possession, and is highly prized as a memento of the heroic old man of Haddington, for whom my father had a peculiar reverence,—as, indeed, we all have. He was our king, the founder of our dynasty; we dated from him; and he was 'hedged' accordingly by a certain sacredness or divinity;" and "that this little, worn, old book was regarded by my father, and is by myself, the sword of the Spirit, which our ancestor so nobly won, and wore, and warred with."

John was over six years old when his gentle and saintly mother died; but while thus early deprived of her tender care, his father's love seemed drawn out to him in greater tenderness and solicitude as his companion, instructor, and guide. They slept together in his father's study—a small room; and as John has pathetically written, "I remember often awaking far on in the night or morning, and seeing that keen, beautiful, intense face bending over those Rosenmüllers, Ernestis, Storrs, and Kuinoels—the fire out, and the gray dawn peering through the window; and when he heard me move he would speak to me in the foolish words of endearment my mother was wont to use, and come to bed, and take me, warm as I was, into his cold bosom. *Vitringa in Jesaiam* I especially remember, a noble folio. Even

<sup>1</sup> *Howe Subsecivæ*, ed. 1882, vol. i., "Letter to J. Cairns, D.D.," pp. 66, 67.

then, with that eagerness to communicate what he himself found, he would try to make me, small man as I was, 'apprehend' (a favourite expression of his father's), what he and Vitringa between them had made out of the fifty-third chapter of his favourite prophet, the princely Isaiah." <sup>1</sup>

Born of such blood, and cradled and brought up in an intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, there is no wonder that in John's future life an expansion of mental powers, and a growth of the Spirit, should undergo progressive development. His desire for knowledge was early shown. When in his fiftieth year he has said, "When a boy, and visiting at a country mansion, that fortnight is still to me like the memory of some happy dream; the old library, the big chair in which I huddled myself up for hours with the New Arabian Nights, and all the old-fashioned and unforgotten books I found there." <sup>2</sup>

My acquaintance with John Brown began when we were of like age in 1822, on the occasion of his father's translation to the congregation of Rose Street, Edinburgh, and when my father assisted at the "Induction" ceremony. We sat together on the pulpit stairs—by special permission as the ministers' sons—the church being crowded to excess; and I felt drawn to him more than to any youth I had ever met, impressed by his looks of sweetness, intelligence, and earnestness, and the keen interest he showed in the proceedings; and from the fact, likewise, that there was a book under his arm, I thought he must be an awfully studious and clever fellow. On further intimacy I soon discovered indications of those characteristic traits of mind and disposition which distinguished him in after life: gentleness and geniality, quickness of observation, a lover of books, an excellent scholar, and having a lively appreciation of the beautiful in nature and art, and of everything in the smallest degree odd or humorous. In the "letter" already quoted, he has told us that his first tasting the flavour of a joke—and "of a word being made to carry a double meaning—and all the lighter of it"—was on hearing that a big perspiring countryman one day rushed into the Black Bull coach office at Biggar, shouting, "are yir insides a' oot?" <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Howe Subscivæ*, ed. 1882, vol. i., pp. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

John was unquestionably more “auld farrant” than the generality of boys, but by no means soft or spiritless. In that inimitable description of a dog fight in the introduction of *Rab and his Friends*, and especially in that part which tells of his liberating with a “gully” knife the head of Rab from a humiliating muzzle, and so enabling that hero ‘to do’ in a twinkling for the game chicken ; if that part of the story of Rab is true, he evinced the genuine pluck of the most spirited youth ; or if fiction, that in his spirit he had the desire to act thus. However, I do not think John ever engaged in the ordinary games and sports of boys, which in those times were football, shinty, hounds and hares, or the sham fights suggested by the classical readings of the Roman wars, or by the recent excitements connected with the Peninsular Campaign. Besides, I never heard of his playing a round of golf, which was a favourite game on Bruntsfield Links in those days before its surroundings became populous ; or firing a shot, or even angling, although brought up in a district so favourable for the pursuit of the “gentle art,” as were the beautiful upper reaches of the Clyde and Tweed, with their many lovely tributary streams and burns. Indeed, I remember him in later years saying, that on one occasion he “tried to fish, and caught everything,—but fish !” He was, however, like his father, a bold and excellent horseman.

John was tutored entirely by his father before coming to Edinburgh in 1822 ; he was then placed for some time under a teacher of the name of Steele ; afterwards transferred to the Rector’s class of the High School under Dr Carson, and proved himself an excellent scholar, especially in Greek, the taste for which was kept up to the latest day of his life ; and latterly he completed his classical and literary education in attending classes in the University.

In May 1827, at the age of 17, by the encouragement of the Rev. John Belfrage, M.D., of Slateford, he now entered on the study of Medicine, and at once began an apprenticeship with Mr Syme. Lapse of time probably may have to some extent obliterated the name of Belfrage from the denomination with which he was connected, or even the sphere in which he laboured ; but a few, as I do, may still remember him, or may have heard of him not only as an able and devoted Seceder



minister, but also as a wise, energetic, and successful amateur physician among his own people, in the then rural village and district of Slateford; and who was not unfrequently asked to consult with Dr Abercrombie and other physicians in Edinburgh in critical cases. Dr Abercrombie has been styled by John Brown our "Scottish Sydenham;" and his panegyric on Dr Belfrage deserves also to be quoted. He has said, "Belfrage was a great man *in posse*, if ever I saw one,—'a village Hampden.' Greatness was of his essence; nothing paltry, nothing secondary, nothing untrue. Large in body, large and handsome in face, lofty in manners to his equals or superiors, homely, familiar, cordial with the young and the poor,—I never met with a more truly royal nature, more native and endued to rule, guide, and benefit mankind. He was for ever scheming for the benefit of others, and chiefly in the way of helping them to help themselves."<sup>1</sup>

John was accordingly apprenticed to Syme, then prophetically looked on by Dr Belfrage as the rising star of Surgery in Scotland. Syme was in his twenty-eighth year, while John was his third apprentice; and forty-five years afterwards, this grateful tribute was paid to his master's memory, whom he may be said to have almost worshipped,—“Perhaps I was too near Mr Syme to see and measure him accurately, but he remains in my mind as one of the best and ablest and beneficent of men. He was my master; my apprentice fee bought him his first carriage—a gig, and I got the first ride in it—and he was my friend. He was, I believe, the greatest surgeon Scotland ever produced; and I cannot conceive a greater, hardly of as great a clinical teacher.”<sup>2</sup>

John was indentured after Syme had given up his anatomical class, and was now teaching surgery in the Extra-Mural School, and struggling to obtain a footing in surgical practice. Soon thereafter, May 1829, Minto House Surgical Hospital and Dispensary was founded by Syme. This was done by his taking a long lease of a fine old mansion in Argyle Square originally built by the Minto family, but which some years since was swept away along with the Square and other historically old buildings in the formation of that now noble thoroughfare, Chambers

<sup>1</sup> *Howe Subsecivæ*, ed. 1882, vol. i. p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, "Mr Syme," vol. ii., 1872, p. 392.

Street, in which, near the site of the Hospital, the Medical School has been built to which the name of Minto House is applied.

The circumstance which led to this bold adventure of Syme's in opening a public Hospital with 24 beds, was the strong opposition which he encountered from certain surgeons and their friends to prevent him obtaining an appointment on the surgical staff of the Royal Infirmary. Advised and encouraged chiefly by the two worthies, Belfrage and Abercrombie, and believing thoroughly in his own strength in course of time to storm the surgical citadel by rivalry in good works, or at any rate to obtain at an early period a high position in surgical fame, he estimated that the probable cost of maintaining such an institution would, to a large extent, be met by board in the Hospital of a Resident Surgeon or pupil, the fees of a limited number of pupils for clinical instruction, and help from the public in donations and subscriptions; while a large private income might be expected from apprentice fees and a systematic course of surgery. In those calculations he was not disappointed; for instead of wrecking his professional progress and prospects, the spirited action in founding and carrying on this unique Institution, his notable surgical achievements, and his lucid clinical and systematic teaching and publications, speedily gained for him the favour of the public and the profession. The twenty-four beds of the Hospital were constantly occupied with most interesting and important cases of surgical disease; the Dispensary waiting-room and outdoor attendance was held in much request; the clinical roll of pupils, to the limited number of forty, was always complete; the systematic surgical class-room, accommodating upwards of 250, was crowded; the number of those apprenticed to him at a high fee was quite unprecedented in the surgical annals of our city; and, finally, in less than five years Syme was Professor of Clinical Surgery in the University, and obtained in virtue of that office the Clinical Surgery Wards in the Royal Infirmary.

It was on the 15th November 1830 that by the advice also of Drs Belfrage and Abercrombie,—the one a family friend, and the other our family doctor,—that I became an apprentice of Mr Syme, eighteen months after the establishment of the Hospital. I was then the 13th on the roll of apprentices; the Institution

was in its full swing of active, attractive, and highly beneficial work; and its fame and popularity great not merely in the city, but throughout the length and breadth of the land, notwithstanding the rivalry of the Royal Infirmary and surgical lecturers, so powerful as were Liston, Lizars, and several others.

John Brown I found had, from the beginning of the Institution, done much good work in the different departments of dispenser, dresser, clerk, and assistant, as well as formerly in connexion with Syme's surgical class and practice, and was a great favourite of his master,—indeed, was more a companion than a pupil. He was also notably popular with the fellow-apprentices, nurses, and patients, which regard and admiration arose from his general intelligence, insight of character, relish for anything humorous, his quaint remarks, ready anecdotes, gentle manners, and the possession of that singularly sweet and sympathetic countenance which he retained to the end of his days.

On entering the little consulting room of Minto House, where were assembled Mr Syme and nine of his apprentices—all strangers to me except John Brown—his presence and countenance was cheering. It is sad to reflect that of that young and hopeful group, with the exception of Dr Edward Ferrand Astley of Dover,<sup>1</sup> all are now no more; and here I may add, that of the thirty-two apprentices Mr Syme had between the years 1827 and 1837, only two, so far as I know, besides myself still survive—and both of these joined in 1837.

In regard to the apprenticeship system which existed at this time, but which came to a close soon after 1837, I may here remark, that it had great advantages when under masters who held office in any hospital, dispensary, or large institution, and when studies and habits were properly supervised; but under other circumstances that bond was a waste of time, and the result in many instances unfavourable, even disastrous. In the early course of the student's life under such masters as Abercrombie, the Bells, Liston, Lizars, Syme, and others, there was less theoretical teaching, less done by cramming, and more by private practical instruction and impressions photographed,

<sup>1</sup> Dr Astley since 1836 has occupied an excellent position in Dover, and founded an hospital there for cases of infectious disease.



as it were, on the brain from sight and touch. The study was thus made more fascinating from its commencement, by gradual child-like opening up of a road through the gates of the senses to higher knowledge; and so by quickening the power of observation, a desire was created for further insight of the mysteries of life, health, and disease. The tendency of such influences and experiences on passing the successive milestones of medical study was to intensify interest in the wonderful developments and adaptations of its science and art: and so it was in these early times at Minto House. Mr Syme being a first-rate botanist, chemist, anatomist, physiologist, and pathologist, as well as a skilful surgeon, met and talked with us apprentices in the large garret room, the museum of the Hospital, and turned to most excellent account in demonstrations, the excellent anatomical, pathological, and surgical preparations, models, and plates which he possessed. Besides, we had the advantage of dissecting parts removed at operations; conducting autopsies; and occasionally performing surgical operations on the bodies of those who died in the Hospital before removal for burial. Thus in the ordinary work and routine of the Hospital and the Dispensary very great advantages were enjoyed: in the Laboratory, excellent pharmaceutical and dispensing practice: in the Hospital, invaluable experience as dressers, clerks, and assistants at operations: in the indoor work of the Dispensary, extensive direct, personal experience from contact with an infinite variety of medical as well as surgical disease, even in the performance of the minor operations of surgery; and at patients' own homes, that sort of experience which is not obtained in an Hospital, but of essential importance to the young doctor who at once enters into general family practice; and in all this too, there was the advantage of ready consultation with one or other of the senior apprentices, or with the chief himself. Thus what was also instilled by Syme's clinical and systematic lectures, and by reference to text-books as cases and difficulties occurred, an amount of knowledge and experience was obtained, which, properly assimilated, tended to produce greater fitness for entering on general practice than any amount of cramming in the early years of study from books or lectures could accomplish. Now of course an apprenticeship system is

incompatible with the enormous boundaries of medical science and the present arrangements of our educational institutions. No doubt the gradual development of sound clinical teaching in the hospital—the introduction of which in Scotland was greatly due to Mr Syme; the institution of practical classes in almost all the departments of medical education; and, latterly, laboratories for scientific research, have greatly met the remarkable evolutionary requirements of medical science and art; yet I must say I think there is something of what was enjoyed in these old days wanting in the present education of our M.B.'s, C.M.'s, and Licentiates, to fit the greater number for entering on the responsible duties of public and private practice. I do not advocate a return to apprenticeship alliances, but I think there should be one year at least, out of a five years' course of study, entirely devoted to clinical work in an hospital, or engaged in a pupilship under a qualified practitioner, or in connexion with a carefully officered public dispensary, or say in an out-door dispensary system grafted on the waiting-room attendance of a public hospital, before a student is launched on the world as if he were a thoroughly qualified doctor. The earlier, too, he has some practical experience, especially in surgical disease, the better.

I may here mention that at this Minto House period the teaching in our University, with two or three exceptions, was uninteresting and unsatisfactory compared with that in later times, either in respect of the matter or style of the lectures, or in the division of the subjects taught. It could scarcely be otherwise when, for example, Dr Monro's course was announced as comprehending besides anatomy, the most important subjects of physiology, pathology, and the principles and practice of surgery! At that time there was much more attractiveness and efficiency in the Extra-Mural School when Knox, Liston, Lizars, Mackintosh, Argyle-Robertson, Syme, Sharpey, and others, occupied the ground. It was to the credit of Syme in 1840, when an University Professor, that he pleaded in the Senatus, and stood alone for a number of years, for the recognition of Extra-Mural lectures as part of the Medical curriculum, so as to stimulate in the University greater life and vigour.

In the daily muster of apprentices in the Minto House con-



sulting-room before or after the Hospital visit or lecture, I may notice that Mr Syme, though at times moody, was in general lively, familiar, and in sympathy with us. Here we gave in our reports since the previous day, noticing any accident or interesting cases admitted or applying for admission; any amusing or exciting occurrence in the Hospital, or outside in the Dispensary practice, which was large; and frequently, as may be believed, there was no small amount of gossip or criticism indulged in, concerning what was said or done at the Infirmary by Liston, Lizars, and their partisans, for rival feelings were strong at that time, and keenly participated in by the enthusiastic apprentices, pupils, and friends of both parties.

The description of Syme long afterwards by Dr Brown meeting his house-surgeons, clerks, and dressers in the small consulting-room of the Royal Infirmary (which doubtless several here will remember), is a felicitous reproduction of what took place years before at Minto House with his assembled apprentices. "How delightful Syme was standing with his back to the fire, making wise jokes—*jacula prudentis*—now abating a precocious youth, now 'heartening' (encouraging) a shy, homely one, himself *haud ignarus*; giving his old stories of Dr Gregory and Dr Barclay. How the latter—who had been a 'sticket minister,' was a capital teacher of anatomy and good sense, used to say to his students,—'Gentlemen! Vesaalius and his fellows were the reapers in the great field of anatomy, John Hunter and his brethren were the gleaners,—and we,—gentlemen! —are the stubble geese!'"<sup>1</sup>

John Brown was acting as clerk in Minto House at the time I joined; and it was immediately after then the incident occurred which is so graphically and touchingly narrated by himself in that world-renowned story of "*Rab and his Friends*." Here I may say in answer to the oft put question, as to the fact or fiction of this most pathetic and artistic story, that Dr Brown himself has settled it in the introduction to his kindly and philosophic paper, "Locke and Sydenham," by saying, "that it is in all essentials strictly matter of fact." It was not written, or at least not published, until 1858, twenty-eight years after the incidents occurred; and from ex-

<sup>1</sup> *Hore Subsecivæ*, "Mr Syme," vol. ii. p. 402.

amination of the books of the Hospital, and evidence elicited recently in correspondence, I have found the date of the occurrence to be December instead of "October" 1830; and the real names of the beautiful, sweet, and suffering "Ailie," and of her practical, laconic, but true and tender-hearted husband, "James Noble," and of the country town "Howgate," of which he was said to be the carrier, are assumed for very obvious reasons.<sup>1</sup> The singularly simple construction, the vivid narrative, and exquisite pathos of "*Rab and his Friends*" have touched many a heart and drawn many a tear. Had Dr Brown written nothing else than this beautiful idyll, his name would have been immortalized by it. It is unquestionably the masterpiece of his numerous papers, meritorious as all of them are. It has gone through many editions in this country and in America, and several translations abroad.

But to return to the narrative of Mr Syme at Minto House Surgical Hospital, perhaps one, or at most two now present may remember him in the class-room of the Hospital, delivering a clinical or systematic surgery lecture. When not demonstrating at the table, it may be remembered how he sat at the side of the stove,—as sketched by myself in 1833 (sketch shown),—with the left hand in his trousers pocket, while the right was generally applied to the corresponding thigh, which he smoothed or gently rubbed from time to time. He was of short stature and slim, although in his latter days stout in figure; his dress most unbecoming, but that of the period—namely, a black, long-tailed coat, with stiff high collar, dark gray or black trousers, and a black and white checked neckcloth. His head was large and finely shaped, nose longish, eyes dark gray, large and penetrating, upper lip full and round, mouth firm—the least pleasing of his features, chin retreating, neck short, and hands and feet beautifully formed and strong. His utterance was at times slightly stuttering, and his voice somewhat muffled; but his delivery was so serious and emphatic, his style so clear, concise,

<sup>1</sup> In tracing out the particulars of the incidents connected with this story a very striking example of the heredity of cancer has come to my knowledge; for besides in the case of Ailie herself, that disease occurred in her daughter, in three sons, in her grand-daughter, a nephew, and two sisters, in all 9 cases. At this distance of time I have had no means of ascertaining what may have been the family history in Ailie's forebears.

and vigorous, and his exposition so distinguished by accurate description and diagnosis, practical common-sense observation, and consistence with physiological and pathological fact, that he was invariably listened to with close attention and interest. His personal appearance changed considerably during advancing years, while his excellent qualities as a clinical lecturer will, I am sure, be attested by those present who were in the profession anterior to 1870, when he was removed from our midst. He was not a brilliant operator like Liston, or Ferguson, or James Duncan ; but neat, cautious, sufficiently bold and rapid, while safe from the thorough knowledge he had of anatomy. His hand too, which was remarkably fine in symmetry, was strong and steady ; and his self-possession and resource were always equal to a difficulty or the unexpected. As he was short in stature so was he laconic in speech ; his publications were conspicuous for conciseness of expression ; in consultation he was brief from accuracy of *tactus*, quickness of diagnosis, rapid perception of the important features of a case, and the honesty and common-sense of his conclusions ; and his prescriptions were also short and simple in the extreme. In correspondence too, his rule was to write wide on either of two sizes of note-paper, according to the importance of the matter in hand, and never to turn the page unless there was some very special requirement to do so. Indeed, he was a man of brevity all round ; and as some one truly said—I think it was John Brown—“ He never unnecessarily wasted a word, a drop of ink, or of blood ! ” By some also he was considered short in temper—nay, he has been spoken of as irritable, quarrelsome, and cold-hearted ; but those who said this could not have known him intimately. That he was frequently engaged in medical controversy and strife is undeniable, but these were troublesome times in our profession in Edinburgh,—very different from the present ; and if time permitted I could show that in the frays in which he was a combatant he was either standing on the offensive from assaults on himself—the outcome of professional jealousy or cabal,—or that he had the courage “ to rush in where angels feared to tread,” in cases of untruthfulness or unprofessional conduct. Those who knew him best esteemed him most. His hospitality was remarkable ; and friendships once formed became



attachments warm and enduring. Five years apprenticed to him, twenty-two years connected with him in Minto House Hospital, installed soon after graduation as his ordinary family attendant, and these relations extending through a period of forty years without a single hitch or disagreement, I had the best opportunities of estimating the true worth of his character ; for thus I saw him in all aspects and circumstances—professional, social, and domestic ; in times of joy and sorrow, of sunshine and clouds ; amid the fame of surgical achievements, the enjoyment of worldly prosperity, as also in public and private trials ; and lastly, when the pleasures and activities and triumphs of life came to a sudden close, and nothing remained but the prospect of the “dark valley” and “the beyond.” Besides, as a surgeon and great operator, he was ever actuated by kind and humane feelings, deeply felt, although not effusively expressed. Often did I witness his sympathy with suffering which he was unable to relieve, and distress in beholding the grief of others, when operative measures failed to preserve the lives of beloved friends. It was, too, a precept constantly impressed by him on pupils, that it was much more creditable to cure a disease by simple means than by operative procedure. In regard also to vivisection, he strongly deprecated it unless some very important point in physiology or pathology was likely to be ascertained thereby ; and he used to abuse Majendie and other experimentalists of the period for atrocities committed in haphazard, objectless research. Medical men and students have been slandered for supposed acts of vivisection, but I never saw anything of the kind done by the apprentices or pupils of Minto House ; and only on two occasions during my connexion with Mr Syme did he himself vivisect. These were the occasions—and I assisted him,—when by operating on a dog he established the interesting and important fact of the power of the periosteum to form new osseous substance independently of assistance from the bone itself.

Bold as an operator, and also as a controversialist, I may also add, Syme was a man of no small pluck when circumstances were trying to courage. This I had frequent opportunities of observing ; but it was conspicuously evinced in entering on his duties in the enemies’ camp, so to speak, and performing his first

operation in the Royal Infirmary, considering the amount and kind of opposition which he had for years encountered. The operation was lithotomy, one in which for expedition and dexterity, as well as ultimate success, his then antagonist Liston was justly celebrated. The theatre was crowded—many medical men in addition to students and the apprentices of the rival surgeons being present. The first steps of the operation were executed with precision and rapidity, but when extraction was attempted a hitch occurred. The friends of Liston and Lizars laughed, while those of Syme looked stern and downcast, until after a minute or two of calm examination first one stone and then another, up to ten in number, were quickly extracted, amid an audible expression of applause. From that day Syme cut his way into universal favour, and had the largest and most loyal following in the wards of the Hospital.

Here I desire to look back in a cursory way on the five years of Syme's spirited adventure at Minto House Surgical Hospital, and to express my conviction, that that short period was the most distinguished and fruitful in the whole course of his surgical career; and I hesitate not to say it was so great, that had he ceased then to use his pen, to raise his voice, or wield his knife, his name might well have been handed down in lasting remembrance.

It was then that Syme introduced a correct system of clinical surgical instruction, that he published his *Principles of Surgery* (of which, I believe, there have been four editions),<sup>1</sup> a perfect model text-book, unsurpassed at the time, and even yet worthy of consultation, notwithstanding the extraordinary advance in physiological and pathological knowledge; the modifications and improvements in surgical procedure,—so many of which were afterwards introduced by himself; and the novelties in constitutional and local treatment since the introduction of anæsthetics and antiseptics. In it the general principles of inflammation, of health and disease, and the self-regulating power of Nature, are ever kept strongly in view; the leading facts regarding varied surgical affections are scientifically arranged and concisely and clearly stated, unencumbered by much detail, but, like a series of portraits touched off by a master hand, with sufficient colour-

<sup>1</sup> MacLachlan & Stewart, Edinburgh, 1831.

ing to be easily recognised and remembered. It was then, too, that he published Quarterly Reports of the Minto House cases in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*,<sup>1</sup> which, if reprinted, might be read with benefit even at the present time. It was then, too, that he published his excellent treatise on *Excision of Diseased Joints*,<sup>2</sup> that of the elbow having been introduced in this country by himself, and successfully practised. It was then also, he was the first in Britain to excise the superior maxillary bone for an osteo-sarcomatous growth, an operation which he successfully repeated several times with the aid of cutting pliers instead of the chisel and gouge ; and also several excisions of the lower jaw. Then, also, he performed many amputations by the flap operation instead of the then usual circular mode, excepting in the case of the leg, in which he introduced a modified form, by lateral semilunar incision of the integuments, reflecting them to the extent necessary for covering the bones. Then in these days he operated in various cases of aneurism, hernia, stone in the bladder, mammary tumours, etc., and treated various fractures and other diseases and injuries, in mostly all of which he made considerable changes on the old methods, and which in the progress of surgery he himself improved on, and others have adopted. Then, again, there were some ailments regarding which he originated entirely new views in diagnosis and treatment—such, for example, as in cases of exfoliation from the pelvis, either from the ischium or pubis, which he explained as having had their origin from sudden strain on that point of bone to which the extensor and adductor muscles of the thigh are attached, and which, from the existence of sinuses in the neighbourhood of the hip, were apt to be taken for disease of the hip-joint or lower part of the spine. Now, too, he drew the attention of the profession to the facts then overlooked or neglected in fistula in ano, namely, the nearness of the internal opening to the verge of the anus, and the proper treatment being division of the small septum lying between it and the external opening without respect to the sinus above, however far that might extend, and then only interposing, for one day, a dressing in the cut surface. Then, long before tenotomy was prac-

<sup>1</sup> From May 1829 to August 1833.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Black, Edinburgh, 1831.



tised for club-foot and other contractions, Syme performed subcutaneous section on the sterno-mastoid muscle most successfully in wry-neck, when there was no complication with spinal curvature. Besides, he had the great credit of introducing the practice of blistering over those otherwise intractable, indolent, or callous ulcers of the leg, in which, from long-continued inflammatory irritation, there resulted a hard, brawny swelling of the limbs—no ordinary œdema,—a thick elevated edge, a smooth ungranulating surface, and a discharge of offensive odour ; but in which, after a night's application of the vesicatory, absorption begins in the edges, detumescence goes on in the surrounding tissues, a healthy granular condition appears in the sore, and cicatrization steadily follows.

But I think I have said enough to show that Syme in the Minto House days was much more than a pioneer in Surgery, while unquestionably he led the way to that which has since been largely adopted in theory and practice. Simplicity characterized all his methods ; and the care taken in the healing of wounds after an operation was very great. Complete closure was for a time avoided, so as to permit a free exit to bloody or serous discharge, although drainage-tubes had not then come into use ; while gentle support with light bandaging was applied to the surrounding parts to obtain approximation of the deeper surfaces. Abscesses also were treated by free incisions at the most depending part ; and the admission of air to exposed cavities carefully guarded against. Besides, Syme was most strict in the observance of cleanliness as regards instruments, sponges, and hands, especially when recently in contact with any sphaculating or erysipelatous surface or inflammatory discharge. In fact, the anxiety shown in such precautions seemed in those non-bacterial days to be a forecast of the presence of the then unseen, and not even yet thoroughly understood, germ enemies ; and of that septic action which has been reserved for his distinguished son-in-law, Sir Joseph Lister, to defy and defeat to a large extent in his now universally recognised antiseptic surgery.

Syme's translation to the Royal Infirmary on 14th May 1833 was doubtless of great importance to himself, the profession, and the public, inasmuch as it was, in clerical phraseology, "a change

to a wider field of usefulness," namely, the possession of a larger number of beds for clinical instruction in connexion with his professorship ; but many regretted the termination of a Hospital so unique in its character, so useful as a rival in medical instruction and good works, and which had communicated a charm and impulse to the lives of many pupils ; and no one at the time regretted it more than myself, as I was then Resident Pupil, and had nearly two years of apprenticeship to run.

But Minto House was not by that event to be altogether closed. There were yet nearly nineteen years of the lease to run ; at least fourteen or fifteen apprentices were on hand whom Professor Syme was under obligation to instruct in their profession ; several others were about to be placed under his care ; and a large medical and surgical dispensary existed, through which much active, popular, and beneficial work was performed, and invaluable experience obtained. Mr Syme therefore decided to continue the Institution as a Surgical Hospital, with a few beds for such private patients as would not go into the Infirmary, but who could pay a small board for accommodation in the Hospital ; and to continue the Dispensary as heretofore. A general charge to carry out this scheme and supervise and assist those apprentices who chose to attach themselves to it was given to myself ; and until April 1834 a number of very important cases were treated in the Hospital, and much varied and good work done in connexion with the Dispensary. Now, however, my connexion with the Institution was abruptly severed by a severe attack of typhus, contracted in visiting the poor during one of those dreadful epidemics, of which Sir Robert Christison has written in his Autobiography, the like of which has not occurred in our city since its sanitary arrangements have been so efficiently carried out.

But here I must go back in my narrative to speak of John Brown. Soon after I had joined Minto House, and after the incidents occurred on which the story of *Rab and his Friends* was founded, John began to do less in the Hospital. He had served ably and faithfully in it, but there were several others eager and able to carry on the work, and his term of indenture was nearly at an end. Besides, it was quite evident that he was not fascinated by the excitement of operative practice ; and as these



were not the days of chloroform or any anæsthetic, his intensely sympathetic and sensitive nature seemed to recoil from the painful scenes of surgery. Be this as it may, it was obvious that the current of his thoughts and tastes was running more in the grooves of literature, while if he pursued the profession of medicine it would be as a physician rather than as a surgeon. However, he continued for some time to visit the Hospital, generally with a volume of Southey, Coleridge, Scott, Carlyle, Wordsworth, or other distinguished author, under his arm, until the summer of 1832, when he was induced to accept an assistant's place with Dr Martin, a general practitioner at Chatham. A story is told of John while there, which showed his true goodness of heart and self-sacrificing devotion to duty. Cholera<sup>1</sup> having broken out with great virulence in that district, the panic became so great that, in the case of a very poor woman, no one would approach her or render the aid she needed. The young student assistant, however, did this ; and it happened that, overcome by continued efforts to save her, he was found at last fast asleep at the bedside, while she had entered on her eternal rest. John returned to Edinburgh in 1833, soon after Mr Syme had commenced his duties in the Infirmary, and in time that year to obtain the degree of M.D. He commenced soon thereafter in general practice for himself, for which he was more than ordinarily qualified from early experience on a surgical basis, from the observant character of his mind, his other varied accomplishments, and the attractiveness of his person and manners.

I have always gratefully considered myself as one of the earliest proofs of his kindly care and skill, together with the aid in consultation of Dr John Scott and Dr Abercrombie, during the epidemic of typhus I have already spoken of. I did not return again to Minto House, as many months were needed to restore strength and prepare for the License of the Royal College of Surgeons and for the Degree of M.D., the former of which I obtained in July and the latter in August 1835. The autumn and winter having been spent in travel on the Continent, and study of special subjects in Paris, I returned to Edinburgh, entering at once into general practice, and found

<sup>1</sup> First invasion of cholera in this country in 1832

that my friend Dr John had secured a very fair footing in the same.

Circumstances soon occurred which, while drawing John Brown and myself closer together, proved a new phase of interest in the history of Minto House Hospital and Dispensary and our connexion with Mr Syme. It was towards the close of 1836 that Mr Syme, finding the establishment financially burthensome, while otherwise not sufficiently compensating to himself, partly from inability in consequence of increasing engagements to direct its affairs and supervise his fifteen remaining apprentices, in several of whom there was a lack of enthusiasm in practical work; and looking to the fact more especially that fifteen years of the lease of the House were still to run, he resolved to break up the establishment, advertise the premises to be let, and employ his apprentices, as far as possible, in connexion with the Infirmary and his private practice.

On hearing this from himself, I offered to take the House with its furnishings off his hands, if such was obtainable at a considerably reduced rent; to continue the Hospital as a *Maison de Santé* for patients who could pay a moderate board according to the accommodation afforded; to carry on the Public Dispensary; and to take the supervision of such of his apprentices as would be willing to conform to rules laid down regarding the in and out practice of the Institution. Further, that in consideration of said reduction of rent, Mr Syme should be consulting surgeon, while any private patients of his own would be attended to in the House, and operated on by himself; that his apprentices, until their term of indenture expired, should have the first claim to appointments as dressers or clerks, and also to the situation of resident pupil; and that they should have all the advantages along with other pupils for Dispensary attendance at the waiting-room examinations and clinics, and unlimited choice in the outdoor practice.

These proposals were eagerly accepted by Mr Syme; and we agreed to invite Dr Brown, and Dr Cornwall—a former apprentice of my own standing—to become joint medical and surgical officers with myself, and of course sharers of risk in upholding the remodelled Institution.

This being agreed to, the Institution was opened with twelve

beds on the 9th January 1837 ; and the expectation of funds to support it were, besides the boards from patients, the board of a resident pupil, the fees of pupils for Dispensary practice, and Pharmacy—under a qualified apothecary—both of which were recognised by the Medical Authorities ; and, lastly, from public donations and subscriptions.

For ten years, under a board of directors, these arrangements were carried on with much cordiality and great benefit to the public, pupils, and all concerned, when Dr Brown, feeling that he had as much hospital experience as he cared for, and that he had obtained a good footing in private practice, while desiring more time for the cultivation of those literary tastes and aspirations—which afterwards were turned to such splendid account—resigned the medical officership ; and Dr Cornwall, taking advantage of this break in the partnership, retired at the same time.

Thus left, in 1847, in sole charge of the Institution, I carried it on until 1852—the five remaining years of the lease—with the aid of a number of energetic pupils. Now, however, as a very large rent was demanded by the proprietor of Minto House ; as a considerable renewal of furnishings would have been necessary for its continuance, and as the pressure of private practice had become too much to allow time for that close personal superintendence essential to secure the successful working of such an Institution, I felt the necessity of giving it up.<sup>1</sup>

Although Dr Brown had retired from the medical officership of Minto House in 1847, he desired to be placed on the board of management, and he came frequently to the Dispensary waiting-room clinique ; was interested in the short course of clinical demonstrations given by myself to the pupils on diseases of the chest and of the skin, etc., illustrated by examination of Hospital and Dispensary patients, plates and diagrams. He was likewise greatly interested in a change I made, under an apothecary acquainted with the cost price of drugs, in the work-

<sup>1</sup> During these fifteen years the number of pupils—exclusive of Mr Syme's apprentices—who took tickets for Dispensary Practice and Pharmacy, were 133 ; the number of medical and surgical patients boarded in the Hospital were 1117 ; and those receiving advice at the Dispensary and attendance at their own homes were 59,568 (of which upwards of 200 were obstetric cases) ; while the total expenditure of the Institution amounted to £4827, 16s. 6d.—or about £322 per annum—an economy which could only be secured by careful supervision.



ing of the Dispensary on the provident principle applied to that department as well as to the boarding of patients in the Hospital. By this arrangement the unique character of the Institution was completed, so that during the last two years of its existence subscriptions from the public were not solicited, as it had become entirely self-supporting. For a time there was a considerable reduction in the number of Dispensary patients for advice ; but soon the Institution was gladly taken advantage of by large numbers of the labouring classes, who seemed to prize more highly advice given and medicine supplied when something was given in return ; while the necessitous poor were recommended to the Old and New Town Dispensaries, for whom such were legitimately intended.

Dr Brown, who as a director drew up the last report, expressed among other things, in the name of the Board, deep regret that the Institution was of necessity being brought to a close, and the hope " that an establishment so unique in character, so wisely benevolent in design, and so eminently beneficent in its results, may be speedily revived, and secured permanently to the community." Although this was published in the newspapers of the day, no one in the profession was so spirited as to act on the suggestion thus given ; and no institution altogether on the same lines has as yet been established, although its record proved that an hospital and dispensary for the industrious classes was a want, and could be maintained on a self-supporting principle.

Your time will not permit me to dwell longer on these Minto House days and doings, to which I look back with so much satisfaction ; and especially do I regret that the compass of this address prevents me saying all that I would like to say respecting John Brown prior to 1852, and all regarding him during the subsequent part of his professional and literary career, when his fame was most established, his popularity greatest, and when he and I were even more closely associated professionally and in the kindly bonds of brotherhood. But as those days came to a close only eight years ago, and as nearly all present must recollect his personal appearance, and have some knowledge of the remarkable individuality of his character and writings, I shall confine my concluding notice within a brief compass.

In regard to appearance, Dr Brown's large and finely-moulded head and forehead, silver locks, penetrating yet soft and sympathetic spectaclled eyes, firm but sweetly sensitive mouth, stout and well-shaped body, and singularly genial and attractive manners, were all too well marked to escape notice or to be soon forgotten. As age advanced beyond the Minto House days, his physical bulk and expressive features increased, his literary productions became more charming, and intercourse with his fellow-men more fascinating, only interrupted at times when natural brightness was overshadowed by clouds of despondency and self-depreciation, which generally had as the exciting cause some family affliction, or the suffering or death of a patient or intimate friend, touching his keenly sensitive and spiritual nature.

His first literary effort was put forth in 1846, when Hugh Miller, the distinguished geologist and gifted author of *The Old Red Sandstone*, the *Testimony of the Rocks*, and other works, and the then editor of *The Witness* newspaper, sent to him a £20 note, with the request that he would contribute to that paper a series of notices of the paintings of the Royal Scottish Academy then being exhibited, hearing, doubtless, that art and paintings were his hobby.<sup>1</sup> This request was received with great astonishment, both because he had no acquaintance with Miller at that time, and never before had written a word for the press. His first thought, therefore, was, as he states in the article afterwards published—"Notes on Art"<sup>2</sup>—to decline the request, "had not my *sine qua non*, with wife-like government, retentive and peremptory, kept the money and heartened me." I need not say how admirably the imposed task was performed in a series of exquisite word-pictures. The paintings in that exhibition were certainly of rare quality, and, indeed, no such critical notices of our annual Academy displays have ever since appeared.

John only needed this beginning of authorship to discover his power to write attractively for the public mind and heart; and encouraged by the universal praise which these notices called

<sup>1</sup> "Art is part of my daily food, like the laughter of children, and the common air, the earth, the sky; it is an affection, not a passion to come and go like the gusty winds, nor a principle cold and dead; it penetrates my entire life, and is one of the surest and deepest pleasures."—*Home Subsecivie*, vol. i. p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 216.

forth, he contributed to the *North British Review*,<sup>1</sup> in the following year, an able article on Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. And now the accumulated knowledge of past years; cultivated taste in the ancient classics, in philosophy, literature, science and art; keen observation of men and manners—of great things and little things; of sympathy with all that is good, noble, and natural in humanity, and appreciation of all that is beautiful in nature and art, were no longer restrainable. Like a stream his thoughts—sometimes deep, smooth, and solemn, sometimes rapid, lively, and sparkling—continued to flow from his pen in a variety of papers for upwards of thirty years, only interrupted at times by seasons of poor health. These were published in various forms, but chiefly as contributions to periodicals and newspapers. Several of these papers were on two occasions collected in separate volumes under the title of *Horæ Subsecivæ*, of which there have been many editions published here and in America; and nearly all of his writings were brought together and published in three volumes under the same title in 1882, almost coincidently with his decease. Here I may notice that, while his pen was swift in the expression of true genius, and while he was always so ready and interesting in conversation, he did not possess the gift of extemporaneous speaking, at least he shunned every occasion on which there was the possibility of his being called on to make a speech in public.

Some have regretted that Dr Brown's name has not been connected with any large work, instead of what have been styled fugitive or fragmentary pieces, which are supposed soon likely to be shelved and forgotten. His health, however, was never so stable, nor character of mind so plodding, as to fit him for prolonged study or sustained effort; but it may be averred that, like the miscellaneous pieces of many of our best writers, both in prose and verse, these short "*Leisure Hours*" effusions are likely to impress the mind and cling longer in the memory than would productions of a more ambitious character.

All that he did write was done, as he himself expressed it, "on the quick." Hence the freeness, freshness, and forcibleness of all his writings. What could be more charming than those descriptions of scenery and country life as are found in his

<sup>1</sup> *The North British Review*, vol. vi., February 1847, pp. 401-30.



“Minchmoor,” or the “Enterkin?” What more delicious in delineation of incident and character as in “Marjorie Fleming,” where the then great unknown novelist, finding himself one day “off the fang” in writing his *Waverley*, hastened to a neighbouring house and carried to his own in Castle Street, during an “on-ding o’ snaw,” in the *cul de sac* of his shepherd’s plaid, his pet Marjorie; and then, after unfolding it and holding her on his knee, spending hours of merriment and wonderment with the “rosie wee wifie” in pretending to be taught by her childish rhymes, and in return teaching her curious old ballads, and getting her to recite passages from Shakespeare!<sup>1</sup> What could be more touchingly pathetic, natural, and memorable than some of the descriptions in *Rab and his Friends*,—such as of Ailie’s “unforgettable face—pale, serious, lovely,” delicate, sweet; her ‘mutch’ white as snow, with its black ribbons; her silvery, smooth hair, setting off her dark gray eyes—eyes such as one sees only twice or thrice in a lifetime, full of suffering, full, also, of the overcoming of it; her eyebrows black and delicate, and her mouth firm, patient, and contented, which few mouths ever are!” Then on her arrival at Minto House, how her husband lifted her from the cart as if “Solomon in all his glory had been handing down the Queen of Sheba at his palace gate; but who could not have done it more daintily, more tenderly, more like a gentleman than did James the Howgate carrier.”<sup>2</sup> Then all that follows,—the operation, the tender watching by James himself, who “wad hae nane o’ yer stryngge nurses;” and lastly, Ailie, when delirious and dying, living her early days over again, singing scraps of old ballads mingled with the Psalms of David, and “rolling up a nightgown, murmuring foolish little words over it,” with a look of surprising tenderness and joy, and holding it to her wounded breast under the impression apparently—as her afflicted husband interpreted it, saying—“Waes me, Doctor, I declare she’s thinkin’ it’s that bairn—the only bairn we ever had—our wee Mysie; and she’s in the Kingdom forty years and mair.” All this and much more is told with incomparable simplicity and power. The death of Rab, too, like those of his mistress and master, is pathetic in the extreme. This I may summarize in a few words. The ground was again

<sup>1</sup> *Home Subsecivæ*, vol. iii. p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 273.

white with snow, and Ailie's grave was in a short time opened to receive her devoted and broken-hearted husband. Rab again looks on at a distance, then slinks home to the stable; refuses food, or to leave Jess the old mare in the stable, or to permit an approach to her, and became so dangerous as to necessitate a happy despatch—which, as the narrator expresses it, "was a fit end for Rab, quick and complete: his teeth and friends gone, why should he keep the peace and be civil?"

There are many other most memorable graphic pictures in these *Horæ Subsecivæ* papers from which I am tempted to quote, but I shall only mention specially those which are to be found in "Notes on Art," "John Leech," "Jeems the Doorkeeper," and "Our Dogs"—particularly regarding "Toby the Tyke." I cannot, however, help quoting again from *Rab and his Friends*, namely, the portrait of Rab himself—a full-length one, and so characteristic of the limner. Rab was "a dog of which there is none such now—one of a lost tribe; brindled and gray like Rubislaw granite; hair short, hard, and close like a lion's; body thick set like a little bull—a sort of compressed Hercules; having a large, blunt head, and a bud of a tail; a muzzle black as night; his mouth blacker than any night; a tooth or two gleaming out of his jaws of darkness. His head scarred with the records of old wounds; one eye out, one ear cropped as close as was Archbishop Leighton's father; the remaining eye had the power of two; and above it, and in constant communication with it, was a tattered rag of an ear, which was for ever unfurling itself, like an old flag; and then that bud of a tail about one inch long—if it could in any sense be called long, being as broad as long,—the mobility, the instantaneousness of that bud were very funny and surprising; and its expressive twinklings, the intercommunications between the eye, the ear, and it, were of the oddest and swiftest. Rab had all the dignity and simplicity of great size; and having fought his way all along the road to absolute supremacy, he was as mighty in his own line as Julius Cæsar or the Duke of Wellington, and had the gravity of all great fighters, or, as a Highland gamekeeper said of his dog,—'Oh, sir, his life's full of sairiousness, he just never can get eneuch o' fechtin'!' " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Subsecivæ*, vol. i. pp. 374-5.



Some have regretted that Dr Brown, being a physician of so much experience and power of observation, should have written nothing special on any strictly professional subject, not even a case in a medical journal. But while his genius carried him by preference on those lines which have instructed and delighted thousands of the general public, he did not overlook the importance and the interests of his own profession ; for in the papers "Locke and Sydenham," "With Brains, Sir," "The Excursus Ethicus," "Lay Sermons on Health," "Our Gideon Grays," "Dr Henry Marshall and Military Hygiene," and numerous memorial sketches of medical men, thus by the reflected light of an all-round knowledge of medicine and medical men, Dr Brown in these papers inculcated thoroughly orthodox views in medical faith and practice, namely, as regards the self-regulating, self-adjusting power of Nature in disease ; the primary importance of considering Medicine as the art of healing, not less than the science of diseases and drugs, and the great importance of a liberal education to qualify a medical man for the exercise of his profession. Besides, he has not overlooked the ethics, duties, and responsibilities of the profession, namely, the courtesy which is due to each other—not always attended to in the present times ; the kindness due to patients, and the consideration due by the public to our profession, and especially to our hard-worked country doctors, the Gideon Grays who, with doubtful praise, have been styled the rough and ready practitioners, but who are, now at least, as gentlemanly and as well equipped as the general run of city doctors. The prime qualifications of a physician or surgeon Dr Brown sums up in these pregnant words :—" *Capax, Perspicax, Sagax, Efficax* :—*Capax*, there must be room to receive, and arrange, and keep knowledge ; *Perspicax*, senses and perceptions—keen, accurate, and immediate—to bring in materials from all sensible things ; *Sagax*, a central power of knowing what is what, and what it is worth, of choosing and rejecting, of judging ; and finally, *Efficax*, the will and the way, the power to turn all the other three—capacity, perspicacity, sagacity—to account in the performance of the thing on hand, thus rendering back to the outer world, in a new and useful form, what is received from it. These are the intellectual qualities which make up the physician, without any

one of which he would be *manus*, and would not deserve the name of a complete artsman, any more than proteine would be itself, if any one of its four elements were amissing.”<sup>1</sup> As a postscript to these philosophical and practical views, I cannot resist quoting a worldly-wise bit of advice which Dr Brown gives :—“ Let me tell my young doctor friends, that a cheerful face and step, and neckcloth, and buttonhole, and an occasional hearty and kindly joke, a power of exciting, a setting agoing a good laugh, are stock in our trade not to be despised. The merry heart does good like a medicine.”<sup>2</sup>

In Dr Brown’s life and work—social, professional, and literary, SPIRITUALITY and a distinct PERSONALITY were the most striking features in his character.

His SPIRITUALITY is either openly expressed, or appears as a pervading breath in almost all his papers. While in social intercourse, although reserved on sacred subjects, it was frequently apparent to those most intimate with him, that even in states of sunny brightness and sparkling humour, a dark cloud of emotion would overspread his countenance, revealing the workings of the inner man. In his later years he was often seen with his eyes closed, as if excluding the outer world from his thoughts, and giving himself up to devout contemplation. Divine reverence and human sympathy were as essences in his nature ; and it was from such indwelling sensibilities and views of life’s seriousness that, like Wordsworth, Cowper, Coleridge, and some other gifted men, he suffered so much at times. What could be more touchingly simple and reverentially expressed, what more indicative of central Christian faith than the concluding paragraph of his lay sermons—“ Plain Words on Health ”—addressed to working people ! “ Good night to you all, big and little, young and old, and go home to your bedside. There is Some One there waiting for you ; and His Son is here ready to take you to Him. Yes, He is waiting for every one of you, and you have only to say, ‘ Father, I have sinned—make me ’—and He sees you a great way off. But to reverse the parable, it is the First-born, your Elder Brother, who is at your side, and leads you to your Father, and says, ‘ I have

<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Subsecivæ*, vol. i. pp. 402-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii., “ Locke and Sydenham,” Introductory, p. 31.

paid his debt ;' that Son who is ever with Him, who is all that He hath."<sup>1</sup>

Then in music Dr Brown had intense delight, although he could neither play, nor did he sing—except in church. When music was good, he would sit a whole evening an enchained listener. Handel and Beethoven were his favourite composers ; and whenever the oratorio of the Messiah was performed in our city, he was sure to be present. I remember his saying that he found its sublime strains more elevating and more promotive of religious feeling than any sermon he had ever heard. It was to him something higher than mere sensual artistic pleasure,—it was a pure devotional exercise, exalting the soul and sanctifying the place. His views of the connexion of morality and religion are admirably expressed in a letter to the late Principal Shairp of St Andrews. "All true morality merges in and runs up into religion ; all true religion blossoms and breathes out into morality and practical and immediate goodness and love. What is the whole duty of man but his entire special morality ; and what is man's whole duty—love to God and love to man, not excluding himself as being a man."<sup>2</sup> In fact, in all the relations of active life the regulating principles of Dr Brown's nature were simplicity, sincerity, integrity, truthfulness, humility, and love ; and nothing was more abhorrent to him than irreverence, heartlessness, affectation, ostentation, pretentiousness, sham, or hypocrisy.

Then all who came in contact with John Brown were impressed and charmed by his distinct PERSONALITY. This characteristic was apparent in personal appearance, tones of voice, the keen gaze through or over his spectacles, perception of peculiarities in persons and things, currents of thought, human sympathies, social affinities, style of humour, play of fancy, and insight and subtle analysis of character.

In the thoroughfares of the city he seemed to know, or to be known by almost everyone. When in good spirits he had a smile or nod for one, a passing quaint remark or joke for another, an amusing criticism on an article of dress or ornaments

<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Subsecivæ*, Appendix, vol. ii. p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Principal Shairp and his Friends*, by Professor Knight, p. 265. John Murray, London.



displayed by a third, or to others ready and happily expressed words of recognition, congratulation, encouragement, or sympathy, as occasion and circumstances suggested. And in the case of canine passers by—for he had many such familiar friends—he had a pat on the head or some commendation or criticism to bestow ; and if they were strangers, an interest manifested in their ownership, breeding, intelligence, or comicality—especially if terriers—of whom he has spoken as “those affectionate, great-hearted, little ruffians!” For dogs in general he had a well-known love ; and though bitten severely by a dog when a child, he has told us that he had “remained ‘bitten’ ever since in the matter of dogs.”<sup>1</sup> He understood them well, and they seemed to understand him. He had a high appreciation of their intelligence. Of Professor Veitch’s dog “Birnie” he wrote on one occasion thus : “Don’t let Bob (a bull terrier) fall out with him : Birnie is too intellectual and gentlemanly righteous not to do everything consistent with his character to avoid a combat.”

Of my own “Dandie” he used to say he “knew only one dog superior to him : he must have been a Covenanter in a former state.”

At the bedside of the invalid, and the case serious, he was grave and warmly sympathetic, giving the full benefit of a concentrated mind, in which there was much professional acumen and varied experience ; while in ordinary cases his cheery smile, witticisms, an appropriate anecdote, or the notice of anything odd or novel in the apartment, diverted for a time at least morbid apprehensions or nervousness in the patient, and so proved highly beneficial—even without a prescription, and with the result that an early repeated visit was longed for.

In society and at the social board John Brown’s extensive acquaintance with literature of all kinds—whether in prose or verse—which he called “fine mixed feeding,” and of literary men ; his acuteness on most subjects talked about ; his remarkable fund of anecdote ; the felicitousness and quaintness of his remarks, and in the way of putting things ; also his geniality, playfulness of humour, careful avoidance of that which might create unpleasant discussion ; and the happy method of drawing persons out to tell what they knew, made his society universally

<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Subsecivæ*, vol. i. p. 181.

courted. On such occasions he was generally the centre of interest ; but he shone brightest in the family circle, or with a few kindred spirits or familiar friends. From this happy and unique combination of kindness and homeliness, tenderness and humour, with true genius manifested both in social life and in his writings, John was not only beloved and admired by his immediate friends, but became the associate or correspondent of many of the most distinguished men of the times. Among these I may mention Carlyle, Ruskin, Dean Stanley, Sir Henry Taylor, Gladstone, Erskine of Linlathen, Sir James Clark, Duke of Argyll, Thackeray, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, Sir Theodore Martin, Professor Shairp, John Leech, Sir George Harvey, Sir Noel Paton, Sir Robert Christison, Rev. Drs Hanna, Cairns, John Kerr, and William Robertson, etc. Although, however, John Brown's acquaintance was very large, his intimacy was by no means indiscriminate, for with all his simplicity of character he possessed a wonderfully searching power of observation ; and as in cases of disease his diagnosis was rapid, so his perception of character was as if intuitive. Thus likings and dislikings were formed generally at first sight, and just ; and when so, proved strong and enduring. But Dr Brown's heart was drawn strongly out to those who like himself possessed a sympathetic and pathetic nature,—quickly moved with pity for those in sorrow, while sympathetic with the joys of others, and especially with such as had in them wit and humour. It has been truly said that tears and laughter spring from the same source, or are readily excited in the same mental constitution ; and it is equally observable that such individuals are strongly attracted to each other. This, indeed, was a powerful magnet in his friendships, and a bond of interest in his professional relations. A lady, one of his patients, frequently inclined like himself to depression of spirits, told me that one day when they were walking together in the country and describing their feelings, he said, "Tell me why am I like a Jew?" She could not answer, so he explained, "Because I am Sad-you-see." Thus he could even be witty on the subject of his own affliction, and at a time when a dark band of cloud hung across him.

His pleasure in the society of women and appreciation of womanly goodness was great, and their attraction to and

admiration of him was sometimes almost idolatrous. Thus his professional success was frequently much indebted to ladies—especially those with warm hearts and of refined intellectual endowments ; and many a fee, I believe, was obtained by him, not so much on account of important illness, as from the desire to enjoy his presence even for a brief interval. On several occasions American ladies, captivated more especially by the Idylls of *Rab and his Friends* and *Pet Marjorie*, were most desirous to see, and if possible to shake hands with the author ; but this kind of inspection and interviewing—when he happened to be somewhat low in spirits—was the reverse of agreeable to him.

His interest in children is well known to have been great. He understood them well ; and their innocent laughter and droll ways were delightful to him. He had always something funny to say or to do to them, in order to excite laughter or wonder, to try their temper, or to draw forth natural peculiarities. Many now grown up to be men and women can recall his bewitching ways. I remember on one occasion he gave a juvenile party, and opened the door himself, attired as a high-class footman, and announced each party by the oddest fictitious names. This sort of joking was sometimes practised even in the company of older people with whom he was intimate. Thus, on the occasion of an evening party, at a time while a notable trial was in progress, and the talk of the assembled company was concerning it, the drawing-room door was thrown open and the waiter solemnly announced—"Major Yelverton and his two wives." During the delay of a few seconds all looked astonishment, until Dr Brown walked in with a lady on each arm. This practical joke proved the key-note of the party, which was a hilarious one during the remainder of the evening. He was always kindly to friends, and courteous to strangers visiting him ; and it was his invariable practice to see every one to the door on leaving, sending them away with a witty remark, sometimes a practical joke, and in every case with a pleasing remembrance of the visit.

Then in correspondence with an intimate juvenile friend, or when calling for some one who happened to be from home, he would, in the former case send, and in the latter sometimes leave, a humorous note signed JEVE BEE in fancy capital letters, with



an artistic pen and ink sketch, not unworthy of a Leech, Doyle, or Furniss, representing, it might be, a man with a small forehead, long nose, a stick leg, and hands in the side pockets of a pea jacket; or of a shaggy-coated terrier in a remarkable attitude, or some other equally grotesque figure. I mention these things, though trivial in themselves, to illustrate the naturally elastic character of the mind of one who—while able to converse on subjects learned and profound, write philosophically and seriously, and mix in society with men of high rank or great intellect—could equally accommodate himself to those of inferior age, position, or mental endowments; and by pen or otherwise promote innocent enjoyment and instruction, winning to himself esteem and admiration wherever he was personally known or his works read. His homeliness, also, and simplicity were very conspicuous. One day the Princess Louise, shortly after her marriage with the Marquis of Lorne, was calling on him at Rutland Street, and coming down stairs from the drawing-room he was overheard to say to her, “And how is your mother?” The naturalness of this was understood.

If there was a humorous side of anything in appearance, manners, speech, or writing, John Brown was sure to observe such when others did not, and to notice it in a way peculiarly his own; but in doing so, from his good qualities of head and heart, and his benign countenance, he never gave offence. Thus meeting him one day, parting from a young doctor who had newly started a carriage, he said—“I’ve just been telling him, I’ll pray for his humility.” But it is not necessary to quote many witty sayings or humorous incidents, and the circumstances in which such occurred, to recall how much of a humorist John Brown was. Quaintness in conversation notably indicated that phase of his nature; and the ready way in which he drew on a rich store of anecdote, and the humorous point which such generally had on a subject under discussion, was as attractive as any genuinely spontaneous witticism. Besides, his papers abound so much in true wit and humour, that they are sufficient of themselves to settle his title to be ranked as a humorist.

In all Dr Brown’s writings his personality is most conspicuous; the style is unquestionably his own, not formed on any classic model, ancient or modern; and their character is unique. They

have been spoken of as bearing some resemblance, if not in style, at least in matter, and especially in humour, to those of the gifted author of *Elia and Eliana*. But although John Brown is known to have admired the genius and enjoyed the humour of Charles Lamb, the individuality of their respective works is markedly distinct, as might be expected, from the widely different early social relations, environments, course of life, professions, and nature of trials of the two men, thus impressing a different stamp on the mind and heart.

I have already said that all Dr Brown's writings were "done on the quick." They are, therefore, natural and pure; full of wisdom, goodness, and truth; drawn, as it were, from the deepest recesses of a spiritual nature. In saying this I may transpose a figure of his own in writing of a worthy and learned friend, long since gone before him,—“His thoughts were as a spring of pure water flowing from the interior heights of a mountain, distilled by Nature's own cunning. . . .” And again,—“He was of the primary formation, had no *organic remains* of other men in him: he liked and fed on all manner of literature; knew poetry well; but it was all outside of him; his thoughts were essentially his own.”<sup>1</sup>

I must now bring this address to a close. I have gone very far beyond what was my intention when I began to write, but yet far short of what I desire to have said. Indeed, I have felt oppressed while writing that I could not within a small compass do justice to the memory of Syme, my revered master; and in writing of my friend John Brown I have been reluctantly constrained to omit the notice of much in his life and work, especially beyond the twenty-third year of the Minto House Hospital days, when his genius was more fully developed, and when, as years advanced, he became more loving, loveable, and beloved.

The enduring impression made by him on the most of people who knew him has been forcibly expressed by Mark Twain in a recent letter to a friend,—“He was the most extensive slaveholder of his time, and the kindest, and yet he died without setting one of his bondsmen free.”

It is now nearly eight years since he was taken from our midst, and I am surprised that as yet no memoir has been

<sup>1</sup> *Howe Subsecivæ*, vol. i. p. 89.



written of him, with critical notices of the most remarkable of his papers, particulars regarding intercourse and correspondence with distinguished literary, artistic, and professional men, the position which he had arrived at in his profession, the public honours which he had obtained ; and some more insight respecting his social life and habits. Only some brief *In Memoriam* notices appeared shortly after his decease in the journals of the day, and lately a little bright and loving sketch, entitled an *Outline* by E. T. M'L.;<sup>1</sup> but I hope that something concerning his person, life and work, more worthy than these or this humble effort, may ere long supply the want, and that lovingly and artistically, just as he could have done so charmingly for one endued with a rare nature such as he himself possessed.

<sup>1</sup> David Douglas, 1889.

## APPENDIX.

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Two hundred and sixty-two years have now elapsed since WM. HARVEY published his treatise *On the Circulation of the Blood*, and dedicated it to King Charles I.,—who took a lively interest in that discovery; and although he was derided by many in the profession and the public as “crackbrained” during the years he was elaborating his theory, and for some time after the discovery was complete and given as such to the world, yet he lived to see its triumph; and ever since he has been regarded as the greatest Physiologist the world ever produced.

Hippocrates, Plato, Galen, Vesalius, Servetus, and several others, had some notions as to the anatomy and functions of the heart and blood-vessels; and long before Hippocrates, the Royal Preacher Solomon in his surpassing wisdom had the same when he speaks in the Book of Ecclesiastes of the “*Pitcher*,” the “*Fountain*,” the “*Wheel*,” and the “*Cistern*.” It, however, remained for Harvey, after years of patient experimental investigation, to demonstrate the motor power of the heart and the all-round circulation; and the glory of this brilliant discovery has never since been dimmed, although some others, particularly Malpighi, perfected the physiology of it. If Harvey had possessed a microscope, he himself in all probability would have demonstrated the transmission of arterial and venous blood in the capillary circulation. The course of the circulation is now, therefore, established for ever, and the name of HARVEY immortalized by it.

Although in my address this evening I have quoted so largely from Dr John Brown’s works, I now beg to quote what he has written regarding Harvey when comparing him as a representative man of the *Science*, with Sydenham, as of the *Art* of Medicine.

“No man in teaching Anatomy or Physiology, when he comes to enounce each new subordinate discovery, can fail to unfold and enhance the ever-increasing renown of that keen, *black-a vised*, little man, with his piercing eyes, ‘small and dark, and full of spirit’; his compact broad forehead, his self-contained peremptory air, his dagger at his side

and his fingers playing with its hilt, to whom we owe the little book '*De Motu Cordis et Sanguinis Circulatione.*' This primary, capital discovery which no succeeding one can supersede or obscure, he could leave consummate to mankind ; but he could not so leave the secret of his making it ; he could not transmit that combination of original genius, invention, exactness, perseverance, and judgment, which enabled him, and can alone enable any man to make such a permanent addition to the fund of scientific truth. But what fitted Harvey for that which he achieved greatly unfitted him for such excellence in practice as Sydenham attained. He belonged to the Science more than the Art. His friend Aubrey says of him, that 'although all his profession allowed him to be an excellent anatomist, I have never heard of any who admired *his therapeutic way.*'" Dr Brown adds, "A mind of his substance and metal, speculative and arbitrary, moreover with a fiery temper and an extemporaneous dagger as its sting, was not likely to take kindly to the details of practice or make a very useful family doctor."<sup>1</sup>

The scepticism and derision which attended Harvey's discovery, also his protracted investigations in regard to the generation of animals, together with troubles in the State and his connexion with Court life, must have had much to do in affecting his success as a Physician. But the sympathy which he met with from Royalty in respect of scientific research ; the turning tide of professional opinion in respect of his merits as a Physiologist, and his advancing years, seemed to have a mellowing influence on a disposition which in youth was said to be choleric ; his dagger was laid aside, and the latter part of his life was spent, we are told, in acts of generosity and munificence, which strongly exhibited the love he bore to his profession, and an anxious desire to promote its future interests.

These acts were chiefly directed to the College of Physicians of London, whose Fellows had come to give him all due honour and respect ; and these partly consisted in building, furnishing, and stocking a fine Museum, in instituting an Annual Festival, and in bequeathing a sum of money to perpetuate that Festival, the object as stated in his will being, "to maintain friendship and mutual love in the profession ;" and further, he desired that an oration be delivered on these occasions to commemorate the example of its benefactors, and so incite others "to search out the secrets of Nature by experiment, for the honour of the profession."

In upholding our Society, therefore, as good HARVEIANS we meet not only to do honour to the name of HARVEY, but also in our orations to

<sup>1</sup> *Horæ Subs.*, ed. 1882, "Locke and Sydenham," pp. 59, 60.

do honour to others who have adorned the Science and Art of Medicine, and around the social board to cultivate friendship and good-will among ourselves.

It is pleasing to see so many of the rising generation of doctors catching the spirit of HARVEY, and eagerly devoting themselves to scientific research. For although so much has been done since Harvey's time in that direction, there is yet an ever-widening field opening up for investigation, in which fame may be acquired and a name handed down to posterity. Few, however, are likely to possess that happy combination of qualities which distinguished Harvey; and only a few have the means and opportunity to occupy their time in such pursuits; but the greater number in our profession may well be contented to give themselves up to the *Art* of Medicine,—what has been called “the therapeutic way,”—if they possess a fair knowledge of scientific truth as ascertained by others; for there is a still wider field open to them in effort for the relief of suffering humanity.





